DAVID

H. L. TAYLOR

Morris Yager
from
Grandma and Aunt Marion.

Feb. 14, 1926.

THE STORY OF DAVID

DAVID CAUGHT THE LION AND SLEW HIM.

THE STORY OF DAVID

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THE STORY OF DAVID

I

DAVID THE SHEPHERD

IN the days of King Saul, who was the first King of Israel, there lived in the city of Bethlehem a man named Jesse, of the tribe of Judah. He had eight sons, some of whom were soldiers in the King's army, but the youngest, David, lived at home and took care of his father's flocks.

David was a bright and clever boy, and as he wandered amongst the hills and valleys with his sheep he loved to notice all that lay around him, and GOD filled his mind with beautiful thoughts about what he saw, so that, when he became a man, he wrote many poems, which will be read

and loved as long as the world lasts. These poems are in the Bible, and are called the Psalms of David.

David was brave as well as clever, and he did not dream away his time and neglect his sheep. Sometimes wild beasts attacked the flocks, and then the young shepherd had to defend his charge. Once a lion came, and actually carried away a little helpless lamb; but David followed the fierce creature and rescued the lamb, and when the lion turned upon him, he fought with it and killed it. We are told also that he killed a bear amongst the hills, and it is very likely that these were only two out of many brave things which were done by David in his shepherd days.

II

THE ANOINTING OF DAVID

WHILE David was still a lad, the prophet Samuel paid a visit to Bethlehem. He came to offer a sacrifice there, and he invited Jesse and his sons to join with him in this act of worship.

Saul had now been King for a long time, and the Israelites had found out that to be brave and wise and handsome is not enough. The ruler of a nation must also be *good*, or he will not govern his people well. Saul knew how to fight, and he was not afraid to lead his soldiers against their enemies; but he did not know how to rule his own heart, or to overcome the evil tempers which sprang up in it. He loved to have his own way, and he would not obey GOD'S commands. He grew fierce and passionate, and sometimes he became quite mad, and tried to injure those about

him. GOD is very merciful and patient, but when men are determined not to serve Him, He sometimes leaves them to themselves, and then they are miserable, as Saul was.

Perhaps the people wished that they had not asked for a King, and we may be sure that they hoped their next King would be a different kind of man. Saul had a son named Jonathan, who was good and gentle, but GOD did not see fit to place him upon his father's throne. GOD'S ways are not like the ways of men, and on the quiet hills of Bethlehem He was teaching the young shepherd David to love and serve Him, and was preparing him to rule over His people Israel.

Samuel knew that GOD had forsaken Saul, but he did not know who was to succeed him until he received a command to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be King instead of Saul.

So he prepared the sacrifice, and one by one the sons of Jesse were presented to him by their father. The eldest, Eliab, was a tall and fine-looking man, and when Samuel saw him he thought, 'Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him!' But GOD could see into Eliab's heart, and

He knew that the proud young soldier would not make a good King. He said to Samuel, 'The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on

'Samuel poured the holy oil on David's head.'

the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.'

Then Samuel turned to the second son, and then to the third; but, even when he had seen all the seven young men, he had not found the one

whom GOD had chosen. This was strange, and he asked Jesse if these were all the children he had. No one had thought of David. He was away with his sheep, and no doubt his father had not troubled to send for the boy to go with him to the sacrifice.

But Samuel said, 'Send and fetch him, for we will not sit down till he come hither.' And when the lad came in, with his bright face all flushed with the fresh air, the LORD said to Samuel, 'Arise, anoint him, for this is he.'

Then Samuel rose up, and poured the holy oil upon David's head, and the spirit of GOD entered into the young shepherd's heart, and from that time he knew that he would one day have to give up his quiet life, and become the ruler of the nation.

III

DAVID AND THE GIANT

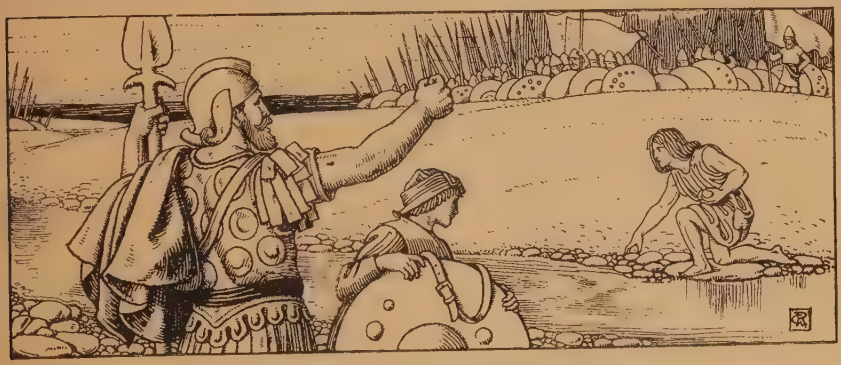
THE people of Israel had not even yet conquered all the nations of Canaan. The Philistines still held the strip of country on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, and they loved to attack the Israelites who lived nearest to them, and to carry off their cattle and their stores of corn. During David's shepherd life, these invading bands gave King Saul much trouble, and as three of Jesse's sons were in the Hebrew army, no doubt the boy often heard stories of fighting and adventures among the hills and valleys, and perhaps he wondered whether *he* would ever be sent to take his place among the brave defenders of his country.

At last the time came for him to show his courage. The Philistines had encamped above the valley of Elah, a *wady* three miles long,

through which the waters ran wildly enough in winter-time, but which would be dry in summer. Jesse knew that his sons had gone out with Saul to oppose these enemies, and as the camp was only about fourteen miles from Bethlehem, he desired David to take a present of cheese and parched corn and bread, and pay a visit to his brothers, and bring news of them and of the army.

No doubt this pleased David very much. He would be as delighted as any other boy to have the chance of seeing the soldiers and their tents. The Philistines were encamped on the hills to the south of the valley, and Saul's camp was on the north, with the deep *wady* lying between the two armies. Just as David arrived, the soldiers were preparing to fight, and the lad hurried to the front, that he might speak to his brothers. As he stood with them he saw, on the opposite side of the valley, a man advancing, whose presence seemed to fill the Hebrew soldiers with terror. He was very tall and strong-looking, and he was clothed in armour from head to foot. He carried a huge spear, and another man, bearing a shield, walked before him. This giant was named Goliath, and

for many days past he had defied the army of GOD'S people, telling the Hebrews that, if they would send their bravest soldier to fight with him, he would be satisfied, and whichever of them subdued the other, that man's nation should be considered conquerors. But although King Saul offered a very great reward to any one who would



'David chose five stones out of the brook.'

kill the giant, not even the most valiant man in the camp dared to go out and fight with him.

David soon heard all about the giant, and when the soldiers heard that the shepherd-boy did not seem at all afraid of this terrible Philistine, they told the King, and Saul sent for him. And the King spoke kindly to David, and when the boy said that GOD would help him, and that he was

quite ready to fight the giant, Saul told him that he might go.

Then Saul armed David with his armour; he put a helmet of brass on his head, and a coat of mail, and David girded on a sword. But when the shepherd-boy tried to move, he found he could not manage all this cumbersome armour, for he was not used to it. So he begged Saul to let him fight in his own way.

Then David put off all the heavy armour, and taking his staff in his hand, he chose five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And thus he drew near the Philistine.

What a strange scene it was! The wide valley, with the hills on either side, covered with soldiers, and, a little in advance of each army, the two champions: Goliath, the giant, in his glittering armour, and David, the shepherd, in his simple peasant dress, with no weapon but his staff and a sling. When Goliath saw him, he laughed at him and mocked him for his youth; but David answered bravely that he came in the name of the LORD, and that with GOD'S help he would kill the man who had dared to defy the armies of Israel.

DAVID WITH HIS STONE AND SLING PREVAILED.

And, as the soldiers looked on in wonder, the lad slipped a stone into his sling, and before the giant could do anything to defend himself, David slung the stone with all his strength, and it struck Goliath on the forehead, so that he was stunned and fell to the ground. Then David ran to him and stood upon his body, and drawing Goliath's own sword from its sheath, he cut off the giant's head, and turned back again to cross the valley, carrying the head of his enemy in his hand. Then the Philistines fled away, and the Hebrew soldiers followed them, and drove them back into their own country.

IV

DAVID AT THE COURT OF SAUL

ALTHOUGH Saul was so proud and so passionate, his servants seem to have loved him, and when his health began to fail they were sorry, and tried to think what would be likely to do him good. He was very miserable, for he knew that GOD was angry with him, and that, whatever he did, it must be without GOD'S help and blessing. Yet his pride would not let him repent, and unless he repented he could not hope for pardon or happiness. So he went on from day to day following his own will and pleasure, and giving way to his evil temper, until his mind became diseased. Sometimes he was only ill and sad, so that nothing would cheer him, and sometimes he was really mad, and frightened every one near him by what he did.

At last his servants thought that perhaps the

sound of sweet music might soothe their unhappy King, and they asked him whether he would like them to find a man who could play well upon the harp, who might come before him whenever these terrible fits of melancholy or passion fell upon him; and Saul was glad to try anything that might help him to forget his misery, so he answered, 'Provide me now a man that can play well, and bring him to me.'

It is very likely that, after the death of Goliath, David would be noticed by the captains of the army and the officers of the King's household. They would take care not to lose sight of the brave boy, and perhaps they were anxious to bring him into a better position than that of a humble shepherd. So one of them mentioned him to the King, saying how brave he was, and that he could play very beautifully upon the harp; and this faithful servant added what was perhaps a comfort to the poor, unhappy King, 'The LORD is with him.'

A messenger was soon sent to Bethlehem, and David was commanded to present himself at the court. We do not know whether he liked the idea of giving up his free life among the hills. Per-

haps he thought at first that it would be a grand thing to live in a palace and wait upon a King; but when he saw the sad state into which Saul

David playing before Saul.

had fallen, he must have felt that it was better to be a simple shepherd with the LORD for his friend than to rule over a nation without GOD'S blessing.

Saul was pleased with David, and he appointed

him to be his armour-bearer. David had many duties to perform, and he tried to do them well, and his bright looks and pleasant manner soon made him a great favourite with every one. The Princes and Princesses, Saul's children, noticed him, especially the eldest son, Jonathan, who became his greatest friend and showed him much favour, even giving him his own robe and sword and bow, which was the highest mark of honour a Prince could bestow upon his servant.

Whenever the King's madness came on, David brought his harp and played upon it, and very often the music soothed Saul's troubled spirit, and the wild, miserable feelings died out in his heart; but he would not turn to GOD, whose power alone could have cured him, so that, although he seemed better for a time, he never really grew well.

V

DAVID IN DANGER

WHEN Saul promised to reward any man who would fight the Philistine giant, he said, amongst other things, that one of his own daughters should be given to the brave warrior for his wife. David lived for some time at the court before the King fulfilled this promise, but at last he married one of the Princesses, whose name was Michal, and so became Saul's son-in-law.

But by this time Saul had begun to hate David. He knew that the young man's bravery and pleasant manners made every one love him, and he became jealous and angry. Before David's marriage it happened that the army of Israel was returning from one of its expeditions against the Philistines. Saul was with the soldiers, and, of course, David was among them. As they passed

through the cities on their way home, the people came out in crowds to see them, as they would do now in our own towns if our soldiers were coming home after a war. The women sang songs in honour of the victorious troops, and in one of these songs they said, 'Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,' meaning that David was a better soldier than the King.

Saul had always been brave. He had led his army well, and if he had been careful to obey GOD'S commands, he would have been a very great and successful warrior. His proud heart could not bear the thought that this simple young shepherd, who had been so short a time in the army, should be praised more than himself. If people cared so much for David, they might wish to have him for their King. And then, perhaps, Saul began to wonder whether *this* was the man whom GOD intended to set upon his throne, and he determined to kill David if he possibly could.

It was not long before one of his strange fits of madness came upon him, and David was sent for, as usual, to play to him. Saul had a javelin, which is a kind of spear, in his hand, and as David stood with his fingers upon the harp-

strings, playing the soft music which he hoped would soothe his master's troubled spirit, the King suddenly threw the javelin at him. It did not strike him, for GOD took care of him; but when this happened a second time, David understood that the King really wished to hurt him.

As time went on, Saul's hatred of David grew greater and greater, and at last he could not keep it to himself, but spoke of it to his servants, and even to Jonathan, telling them to kill David for him. Jonathan was very much grieved at this, and he reminded his father of the faithful manner in which David had always served him, and he persuaded him to receive David kindly, and treat him as he had done before.

But this did not last long. David gained another victory over the Philistines, and the King's jealousy was roused again. Once more he threw the javelin at David, and the young man fled from him, and escaped to his own house.

His wife, Michal, loved him very much, and she soon found out that her father had sent men to watch the house, so that when David left it in the morning they might kill him. How could she save her husband's life? At last she thought of a

clever plan. She helped him to escape through one of the windows in the night, and she placed an image in his bed, so that none of her own servants might know that he was not sleeping in it.

In the morning, Saul's messengers came to fetch David that he might be put to death; but when they entered his bedroom, thinking that he was ill and would be unable to save himself, they found only the image lying upon a pillow. Saul was very angry with Michal, but the Princess knew that her husband was safe, and this made her glad.

VI

THE COVENANT OF DAVID AND JONATHAN

DAVID could not at first understand Saul's behaviour to him. When he escaped from Gibeah he went to Ramah, where the prophet, Samuel, lived, and told him all that had happened, and Samuel took him to Naioth, where they stayed together. But David could not rest. He had left his wife at Gibeah, and he thought that perhaps Saul's anger might only have been caused by some little thing, and that if he returned to the court all might go on happily as before.

He did not let the King know of his return. He went secretly to Jonathan, and asked him what had offended Saul. Jonathan tried to persuade him that the King had not really meant to do him harm, but David could not believe this, and he said to Jonathan, 'There is but a step

between me and death.' Then the Prince asked David what it would be best for them to do, for he neither wished to part with his friend nor to have him put his life in danger by returning to the court.

It happened that the next day was the Feast of the New Moon, and the officers of Saul's household would be expected to dine at the King's table. David would not be there, and he told Jonathan that if Saul missed him, and asked the reason of his absence, Jonathan must make an excuse for him. If Saul received the excuse graciously, the Prince would know that his father's anger was not real, but only a part of his madness, and that, so long as he was in his right mind, David would have nothing to fear; but if he appeared to be displeased, it would be better for David to leave Gibeah altogether.

All this was very sad for Jonathan. No doubt he loved his father, in spite of the many wrong things which Saul had done; and he loved David also. It was hard for him to lose his dearest friend, and still harder to think of the reason of his departure. But Jonathan knew that it would be better to let David escape at once than to

keep him at Gibeah at the risk of his life; so he went out with his friend into the open country beyond the city, where they could talk quietly together, and the two young men planned what they should do. David was to hide himself until the third day of the month, and then Jonathan would meet him at a certain spot, and tell him how the King had behaved.

Then the Prince made a solemn covenant, or agreement, with David, promising faithfully that he would warn him if he were in danger; while, for his part, David promised that he would show kindness to Jonathan as long as he lived. Perhaps Jonathan knew that David would be King, and in those days when a King of a new family came to the throne of any country, he very often put to death all the relations of the former King, lest they should be tempted to rebel against him. So Jonathan made David promise that he would continue his kindness, not only to himself, but to his children after him.

VII

DAVID'S FLIGHT FROM GIBEAH

WHEN the King sat down at his table on the Day of the New Moon, he noticed that David's place was empty, but he did not say anything about it. On the second day of the month the young soldier was again absent, and Saul turned to Jonathan and said, 'Wherefore cometh not the son of Jesse to meat, neither yesterday nor to-day?'

Then Jonathan made an excuse for his friend, but Saul answered him very angrily, telling him that, so long as David lived, he could never hope to wear the crown of Israel himself. And he commanded Jonathan to send for David immediately that he might be put to death.

Jonathan tried to soothe his father's anger, saying, 'Wherefore shall he be slain? What hath he done?' But this provoked Saul [still

more, and he flung his sharp javelin at Jonathan, for his rage was so great that he was ready to kill even his own son.

Jonathan was afraid to remain at the table, and he went away in great sorrow, for now he felt sure that there would never again be peace between the King and David. On the third day he

'Jonathan shot an arrow.'

took his bow and arrows, and went out of the city. A little boy went with him, and when the Prince began to shoot, he watched where the arrows fell, and brought them back to his master. Presently, when the boy was at some distance, Jonathan shot an arrow which passed over him, and fell still farther away, and as he was searching for it, the Prince cried, 'Is it not beyond thee?'

David was hiding near this very spot, and when

he heard these words he knew that Jonathan had bad news for him. The boy brought back the arrow, and his master gave him the bow and the quiver, and told him to return to the city, and as soon as he was out of sight, David came from his hiding-place, and bowed himself to the ground three times. Perhaps he did this to show that, whatever might be his feelings towards the King, his love and respect for the Prince were unchanged. But Jonathan was too full of grief to think of his own high rank and of David's lower position. He could only remember how dearly he loved his friend, and that this might be the last time they would see each other.

The parting was very sad. The two young men wept together, and kissed each other, and then Jonathan told David that he must go away from Gibeah at once, and he reminded him of the covenant that they had made three days before, saying, 'The LORD be between me and thee, and between my children and thy children for ever.'

Then, with many tears and sorrowful words, they parted, and David went in search of a safe hiding-place, while Jonathan returned to Gibeah.

VIII

DAVID SEEKS A REFUGE

DAVID was now in great trouble. His home, his wife, and his dearest friend must all be left behind, and he must find some place of refuge for himself, where he would be out of reach of the angry King. He had not forgotten that he would himself be King some day, and he felt that, as GOD intended to raise him to the throne of Israel, he might be sure that his life would be preserved; but he was not foolish enough to suppose that, if he went *needlessly* into danger, GOD would take care of him. He knew that he must do his best to keep out of Saul's way, and that GOD would help him to do this, and would protect him in times of peril.

He had no food with him, and he did not dare to go back into the city, so he went first to the tabernacle, which had been moved from Shiloh

to the town of Nob, and there he sought out Ahimelech, the High Priest, who gave him, not only a supply of bread, but also the famous sword

'The High Priest gave David the famous sword of Goliath.'

of Goliath, which had been kept in the tabernacle as a memorial of the great victory of Israel over the Philistines.

Perhaps the sight of this sword put into David's

mind a way of escaping from Saul. He would go to Achish, the King of Gath, the very city in which Goliath had lived, and seek refuge with him. Achish might have been willing to receive him, for he knew how brave and wise he was, and felt that, now he was at enmity with Saul, he might be of great use to the Philistine army. But the men of the court were displeased, and reminded Achish that David would one day be King of Israel, and could not, therefore, be *really* friendly towards their nation; and they also repeated the words of the Hebrew song in which David had been praised for the number of Philistines whom he had slain.

David saw that it would be impossible for him to remain in Gath, yet he scarcely knew how to escape, for it was very likely that, if he were seen departing after so short a stay in the city, the Philistines would think he had come as a spy, and that his story of Saul's anger had been only an excuse. So he pretended to be mad. In those days there were no asylums for people who had lost their reason. No one knew how to cure or relieve them, and they were usually driven away into lonely places to take care of themselves and

find a living as they could. David soon found himself once more in the open country, and out of reach both of the Philistines and of Saul; but he was still homeless, and without any means of living.

Poor David! Perhaps he had enjoyed the stir and excitement of his life at court; but no doubt, in his loneliness, he looked back with regret to the time when he had been a light-hearted shepherd-boy on the hills of Bethlehem. Should he return to those wild hills which he knew so well? There were caves in them, which were often used as folds for the sheep, or even as dwellings for the shepherds. Could he not hide in one of these?

He was not far from the *wady* of the Terebinth, in which he had slain Goliath, and he remembered a cave there which would be a safe hiding-place, and would also be within a short distance of his old home.

IX

THE WANDERINGS OF DAVID

THE cave which David had chosen for his home was called the Cave of Adullam. He did not live there alone. His father and mother heard where he was, and came to him, for they feared that Saul in his anger at David's escape might order them to be put to death. And before long a number of men who were not satisfied with Saul's government gathered round David, until at last he found himself at the head of four hundred soldiers.

He knew that the life he must lead during the rest of Saul's reign would be a very unsettled one, and that he might not be able to take proper care of his father and mother; so he went into the country of Moab, and asked the King to allow Jesse and his wife to make their home for a time in the city of Mizpah. Then he left the cave,

and removed with his followers to the forest of Hareth.

While he was living in the forest, Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, the High Priest, came to him with sad news. Saul had been told of Ahimelech's kindness to David on the day when he fled from Gibeah, and the angry King had summoned, not only Ahimelech, but all the priests who lived in Nob, to appear before him, and accused them of conspiring against him and of helping his enemies. Ahimelech told Saul that he had known nothing of David's flight, and that he had supposed the young man to be journeying on some business for the King; but Saul did not believe him, and in his rage he commanded all the priests and their wives and children to be slain. Abiathar had escaped, and had come at once to David, knowing that his life would be taken if he were to fall into Saul's hands.

The Philistines used to come down into the valleys in harvest-time, and carry away the crops which the Hebrews had stored for their own use. David heard that they were attacking a little town called Keilah, and he went with his men and drove them away. But the people of Keilah

were ungrateful, and would have delivered him up to Saul if he had remained with them, so he departed, and hid himself in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul and his soldiers were pursuing him from place to place, and he was always in danger of losing his life; but he trusted in GOD, and, although he had many narrow escapes, the King was never able to hurt him.

While David was in the wilderness he had one very great pleasure—a visit from Jonathan. The Prince came secretly to see his friend, and he begged David not to be afraid, for GOD would prevent Saul finding him, and would surely make him King.

The men of Ziph were anxious to please Saul, so they soon sent messengers to tell him where David was; but just when the King's soldiers had found out David's hiding-place, and were preparing to take him prisoner, news came to the camp that the Philistines were invading the land, and Saul had to hurry away with his army to drive out these enemies.

David now took his men to another part of the country, the cliffs of Engedi, above the Dead Sea, where the hill-sides were pierced with many

caves, in which he could live with his faithful followers.

When Saul had subdued the Philistines he began once more to search for David, and one day, being weary, he entered a cave and rested there for a short time. He thought that he was alone, but as he was walking away from the cave he heard a voice calling him, and when he turned he saw David at a little distance, and in his hand the young man held a piece of stuff.

What was it? Saul soon understood what had happened. David and his men had been hidden in that very cave. If they had chosen they might easily have attacked and killed the King, but David would not allow this to be done. He crept up softly, and cut off a piece of Saul's robe to show how very close he had been to him; but he said to himself, 'I will not put forth mine hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed.'

X

THE UNKINDNESS OF NABAL

WHEN Saul knew how David had behaved, he felt very much ashamed of himself, and he spoke very graciously to David, and said to him, 'The LORD reward thee good for that thou hast done unto me this day.' Then he went away with his soldiers, and did not try to hurt David again for some time.

Not long after this David was in the wilderness of Paran. A very rich man, whose name was Nabal, had large flocks of sheep and goats feeding in the pastures near to the little town of Carmel, and whenever David and his men were in that part of the country Nabal's servants found that they were very friendly, and of great use in protecting them and their flocks from the attacks of robbers and wild beasts. David expected that Nabal would be quite ready to follow the custom

of those days by giving him a supply of provisions in return for his kindness to the herdsmen, so he sent ten of his young followers with a message to the rich man.

It was at the time when the sheep were shorn, and Nabal was very busy. When David's messengers came to him, he answered them roughly, and refused to give them food; so David ordered his men to gird on their swords, and he began to march towards Nabal's house, intending to punish him for his unkind behaviour.

Nabal's servants soon heard that David was coming at the head of four hundred men, and one of them hastened to tell his mistress what had happened, and to warn her of the great danger they were in. Abigail, Nabal's wife, was a wise and beautiful woman, and she was not long in making up her mind what to do. She knew how ill-tempered her husband was, and that he was in the habit of treating people rudely and unkindly; so she said nothing to him of David's approach, but ordered her servants to bring out a train of asses, and load them with bread, and wine, and meat, and corn, and fruit, and carry these provisions as quickly as possible to David. Then she

herself rode down to meet her husband's enemy, and bowed herself to the ground before him.

David was willing to listen to her, and, when

'Abigail bowed herself to the ground before David.'

she explained to him that she had not seen his messengers, and begged him to overlook the rudeness of her husband, he felt sorry for her, and he told her that she might return to her house in

peace, for he would not harm either Nabal or his household.

So Abigail went back to her house at Carmel, and not long afterwards Nabal died, and she was left a widow. David had not forgotten either her beauty or her gentle words. She had brought him food, and she had saved him from shedding much blood, so he felt grateful to her, and when he heard that she had lost her husband he sent his servants with a message to her, saying that he wished to marry her.

Abigail could not have been very happy with Nabal, and no doubt she had heard much of David's courage and kindness. She felt that she had no need to hesitate, so she prepared at once for her journey, and, taking five of her hand-maidens with her, she returned with David's messengers and became his wife.

XI

SAUL'S LAST MEETING WITH DAVID

SAUL left David in peace for a time, but at last the men of Ziph sent him a message, saying, 'Doth not David hide himself in the hill of Hachilah?' When Saul heard this he forgot all his promises, and took three thousand men, under the command of Abner, one of his chief officers, and set out for the wilderness once more.

David heard that the King was pursuing him again, and in the night he went with his nephew, Abishai, to look at Saul's camp, which had been pitched in a valley. They found that all the soldiers were sleeping, even those who ought to have been keeping watch. No doubt they were tired with their march, and as David and Abishai stepped softly through the camp no one awoke, and they came at last to the spot where Saul

himself lay, with his spear stuck into the ground beside him.

For the second time David had it in his power to kill his enemy, but he would not do it. He took the spear in his hand and a jar of water which was close to it, and stole quietly away again without disturbing any of the sleeping soldiers. When he had reached a safe place on the hillside above the camp he turned and shouted very loudly, so that Abner and his men were soon roused from their slumber. Then he asked them how it was that they could not take better care of their King, and he held up the spear and the water-jar to prove that he had really been close to Saul, and that he might easily have killed him in his sleep.

When Saul knew what had happened he felt ashamed and sorry, as he had done after his escape at Engedi. He called David his son, and begged for his forgiveness, asking him to return to his home, for he would never again seek to do him harm; but, although David answered him kindly, he would not return with him, for he knew that the King could not be trusted, and that his life might very soon be again in danger.

Saul went back to Gibeah with his army, and David determined to leave the land of Israel altogether, until in GOD'S good time he should become King. He had now a band of six hundred men with him, and he passed over into the country of the Philistines, and once more visited Gath, where Achish, the King, received him kindly, and allowed him to settle in one of his cities, with his followers and their families.

XII

DAVID AT ZIKLAG

ALTHOUGH David had taken refuge with the Philistines, he did not wish to follow King Achish when he went out to fight with the armies of Israel. But Achish knew how brave he was, and that he had trained his men well, so he said to him, 'Thou shalt go out with me to battle, thou and thy men.'

David did not like to say he would not go, lest the King should be angry, and Achish felt pleased to think that he would have so good a soldier to help him in fighting with Saul.

Ziklag, the city which had been given to David, was a long way from Gath, on the borders of the desert country inhabited by the Amalekites and other people who were friendly with the Philistines. David and his men fought often with the Amalekites, but Achish did not know this, and he

believed that the little army was doing him great service in keeping back the Arab tribes with whom he was at enmity.

At last, when David had been at Ziklag for about sixteen months, he was summoned to Aphek, where the Philistine army had assembled, and was told that Achish intended once more to invade the land of Israel, and that he would be required to fight also. This was very terrible, for David and his men feared lest they might meet their own friends and relations in Saul's army, and be forced to fight against them. But GOD did not allow this to happen. The lords and captains of the Philistines did not like David. Perhaps they were jealous because he had won the favour of the King. So they complained, saying, 'What do these Hebrews here?' And Achish answered that David was now his faithful servant; but the Princes were angry, and declared that he should not go with them to battle, for they felt sure that he would betray them into the hands of Saul.

So David gathered his men together, and returned to Ziklag. He had not been absent many

days, but when he reached the city he found it empty and in ruins. The Amalekites had revenged themselves upon him by carrying away all the women and children, and setting fire to the houses in which they had lived. At first David's soldiers could do nothing but weep. Then they became angry, and even thought of putting David to death, because it was through him that they had left their families unprotected. But GOD took care of David, and he soon roused himself from his grief and desired his men to join him in pursuing the Amalekites.

The little army set out once more, and before long they overtook their enemies, who were feasting and rejoicing in the midst of the spoil which they had carried away. Then David fell upon them, and overcame them, and rescued all the captives, and recovered all the things which had been taken from Ziklag, and returned in triumph to the city.

The Amalekites had been robbing other cities also, and David brought home with him much spoil. He was very glad of this, for it enabled him to give presents to the people who had helped

him when he was living in the land of Israel; so he hastened to divide it, and sent gifts to all his friends, saying, 'Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the LORD.'

XIII

THE DEATH OF SAUL

WHILE David was pursuing the Amalekites, Achish was leading his army into the land of Israel. No doubt David wondered whether he would be successful, or whether Saul would be able to drive him back into his own country again; and we may be sure that all the little band of Hebrew soldiers at Ziklag felt very glad that they had not been compelled to follow Achish and fight against their own kinsmen.

David had returned in triumph to the city, bringing with him the rescued women and children, and much spoil. For two days no tidings came from the field of battle, far away among the hills of Gilboa; but on the third day a man was seen running towards Ziklag with his clothes rent and dust upon his head. This showed that he was the bearer of bad news, and very soon David knew

what it was. Achish had defeated Saul's army, and the King and his son Jonathan were dead.

At first David could scarcely believe this, and he asked the young man how he knew what had happened; and the man answered that he had seen Saul in great danger, and that the King had begged him to put him to death, so that he might not fall into the hands of the Philistines. He felt sure that Saul could not live because of his wounds, so he slew him there upon the mountain, and he had brought away his crown and the armlet he was wearing. He laid these before David to prove that his story was true; but, instead of rewarding him for what he had done, David asked him how it was that he had not feared to put forth his hand against the King, and he ordered him to be slain himself for committing so great a crime.

The story was *not* true. Saul was indeed dead, but he had died by his own hand. He had been so wounded that he could not escape from his enemies, and he thought that the cruel Philistines would torment him if they found him lying helpless upon the field. He had no comfort in his terrible distress. He had forsaken GOD, and his

'HOW KNOWEST THOU THAT SAUL AND JONATHAN ARE DEAD?'

heart was full of misery and despair. His armour-bearer was with him, and Saul said to him, 'Draw thy sword and thrust me through therewith.' But

David hears of the death of Saul.

the armour-bearer was afraid to obey such a command. Then Saul took a sword and fell upon it; and when the armour-bearer saw that his master was dead, he also killed himself.

It was a very sad day for the Israelites, and when the people who lived in the cities near the battle-field heard what had happened, they fled away from their homes, and left their houses and all their goods to be taken by the Philistines.

The Philistine soldiers were full of joy when they found the bodies of Saul and of his sons. They hung Saul's armour in the temple of their goddess, Ashtaroth, and they sent messengers throughout the country to tell of their victory. Then they cut off the head of the poor dead King, and fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan.

The men of Jabesh-Gilead, a city not very far away, had loved Saul because he had once helped them when they were in great trouble and danger; so, when they heard what had been done, they went by night to Bethshan, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons, and carried them away to their own city. There they buried them under a tree, and mourned for seven days.

XIV

DAVID'S REIGN IN HEBRON

DAVID did not rejoice over the death of Saul. When he heard of his terrible end, he thought only of his bravery, and forgot his treachery and unkindness.

And Jonathan was dead, also—the dear friend whom he had loved so well. David mourned for him very deeply, though perhaps he was glad to feel that, in becoming King himself, he would not be taking the crown from Jonathan.

Saul had had four sons, and three of them had been killed in the battle of Gilboa. The youngest, Ishbosheth, succeeded his father, and reigned over Israel for two years. Abner and a part of the army remained faithful to him, but a great number of the people followed after David, and at GOD'S command he went up to Hebron, where the men of Judah met him and anointed him King. But

where there are two Kings in a country there cannot be peace, and during the rest of Ishbosheth's life there was constant fighting between his soldiers and the soldiers of David.

David had three nephews, the sons of his sister

'The men of Judah anointed the King.'

Zeruiah. Their names were Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. These three young men were very brave, and Joab became the leader of David's army. He

fought as bravely for his master as Abner did for Ishbosheth, and the two captains hated each other very much. After one battle, Asahel pursued Abner, and was killed by him, and for this Joab would not forgive him. He determined to revenge himself for his brother's death, but for a time he had no opportunity of doing this.

At last Ishbosheth, who was a weak and foolish man, quarrelled with Abner, and Abner sent secret messages to David, offering to make peace with him. David agreed to meet him at Hebron, so he came there with twenty men, and David made a feast for them, and Abner promised to gather all the people together under David's rule.

Joab was away from Hebron at that time. Perhaps David had sent him away on purpose, lest he should try to kill Abner. But when he returned he heard all that had been done in his absence, and he was very angry indeed. He sent a message to Abner which caused him to make a second visit to the city. Joab met him in a friendly manner, and pretended that he wished to speak to him secretly; but when Abner went aside with him, he struck him with his sharp dagger and killed him.

When David heard of this wicked murder, he was very much displeased, but he did not dare to punish Joab, because he was the chief of the army. This was not right; he ought to have done his duty, and trusted in GOD to protect him if his soldiers were angry. From that time Joab knew that David feared to offend him, and this made him proud and self-willed, so that he caused the King much trouble.

But although David did not punish Joab, he did all he could to show the people that he was sorry for Abner's death. He ordered his body to be buried with great pomp, and himself followed the dead chieftain to the grave.

Not long after this Ishbosheth was murdered by two of his officers, and then no one was left of Saul's family except a little lame boy, named Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. The people did not care to be ruled by this child, so the elders of all the tribes came to David and acknowledged him to be their King. They brought with them offerings of cattle, and bread, and fruit, and wine, and oil, and for three days there was feasting in Hebron and great rejoicing, and David was proclaimed King over the whole land.

Later on, when David's power was fully established, he asked: 'Is there yet anyone that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?' He was told there was a servant left whose name was Ziba, and from this man David learnt where Mephibosheth was then staying.

Then David had Mephibosheth sent for to the palace, and said he would surely show him kindness for Jonathan his father's sake. All the land belonging to Saul was restored to him, and Ziba and his sons and servants were appointed to till the ground and be his servants. 'As for Mephibosheth,' said the King, 'he shall eat at my table as one of the King's sons.'

So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, and ate always at David's table, as if he were the King's own son.

XV

DAVID IN JERUSALEM

DAVID reigned for seven years in Hebron, but it was not a convenient city for the King's home, because it was quite in the south of the land. Saul had lived at Gibeah, which was nearer to the middle of the country; and not very far from Gibeah there was a famous fortress, built upon two hills, whose sides were very steep and difficult to climb. It belonged to the Jebusites, and although the people of Israel had once succeeded in capturing it, they had been obliged to give it up again, and had long since left off trying to get possession of it.

David determined to take this fortress, and to make of it a royal city. The Jebusites did not think that he could get into their stronghold, and they were not at all afraid when his army assembled in the valleys. But they did not know

how brave and clever his soldiers were. Very soon Joab found out the weakest part of the defences, and, forcing his way into the fort with his men, became master of Jerusalem, which has ever since been the capital, or chief city, of the land of Israel.

The two hills on which Jerusalem is built are Mount Moriah and Mount Zion. It was on Mount Moriah that Abraham offered up Isaac, and received God's blessing, and the promise that his descendants should be in number as the stars of heaven and as the sand upon the sea-shore.

About this time Hiram, the King of Tyre, sent friendly messages to David, and as his workmen were very clever, he allowed some of them to come to Jerusalem, and they helped David's workmen to build a beautiful palace upon Mount Zion.

As soon as David became settled in his kingdom he brought the Ark from Kirjath-jearim, where it had been since the death of Eli, and placed it in a tabernacle which he had prepared for it at Jerusalem. The people rejoiced greatly when the Ark was carried into the city. Sacrifices were offered and a procession was made. Men went

before the Ark singing and playing upon harps and cymbals, and David himself went with them and joined in the songs of triumph.

But he was not satisfied with having the Ark near to him. He felt that GOD'S house ought to be more beautiful than his own, and he thought that he would like to build a magnificent temple, in which the people might assemble for their daily worship. He spoke of this to Nathan, the prophet, saying, 'I dwell in an house of cedar, but the Ark of GOD dwelleth within curtains.' And Nathan said, 'Do all that is in thine heart, for the LORD is with thee.' But the next day Nathan brought a message from GOD to the King, saying, 'Thou shalt not build Me an house to dwell in.'

David had been a man of war. He had fought many battles and killed many people. The builder of GOD'S house must be a man of peace, and GOD promised that David's son, who should succeed him, should have rest from his enemies, and that he should build the house. So David took care during all the rest of his life to gather up treasures of every kind; and GOD taught him, as He had taught Moses in the wilderness, exactly how the

house or temple was to be built, and David prepared all the plans and the patterns, so that when the right time came his son would have no difficulty in carrying out the great work.

XVI

THE NUMBERING OF THE PEOPLE

DAVID was now at peace with all the people of Israel, but he had still many enemies beyond the borders of his own land, and he needed a good army, with clever officers and brave soldiers. The Syrians, the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Amalekites, and the Philistines, all fought against Israel; and, one after another, David subdued these nations, and forced them to pay him tribute. He soon became a very rich and powerful King, and whatever he did prospered, because he trusted in GOD.

But no one in this world is ever quite good and perfect. Only the holy angels can serve GOD without ever displeasing Him. David loved GOD with all his heart, but sometimes he did not seek for His guidance, and then he made mistakes. He thought one day that he would like to know

how many people he was ruling over. Perhaps his success in war had made him proud. He knew that the Kings who lived near him were afraid of him, and that his nation was now considered to be one of the great nations of the world, but he was not satisfied with this. He

'Counting the people.'

sent for Joab and said, 'Go now through all the tribes of Israel, and number ye the people.'

Now, although Joab was not a faithful servant, he was a very wise soldier, and he thought David's plan was a bad one. It was the custom of those days for the head of each tribe or family to follow his King to battle, bringing with him as many men as he thought fit; and perhaps Joab thought

that if the people were counted they would fancy that David wished to know how many fighting men there were in the land, so that he could himself summon them at any time. The chiefs of the tribes would not like this, and the people would not like it either, so Joab tried to persuade David to change his mind.

But David was determined to have his own way, and Joab was obliged to obey his command. He took some officers with him, and they travelled through the land, counting the people in the cities and villages as they went. When the people in England are counted, the work is all done in one day, but Joab was nearly ten months in numbering the people of Israel. At last he returned to Jerusalem, and when David heard that he could, if he wished, go out against his enemies with several hundred thousand men, he felt very much pleased.

His pleasure did not last long. In the midst of his pride came a feeling of shame, for he began to see that he had acted foolishly. He had not asked for GOD'S counsel, and he had not listened to the advice of Joab. He had been wilful as well as proud, and now he was sorry.

GOD allowed David to have his own way, but He did not allow his folly to remain unpunished. The prophet Gad brought him a sad message. His prosperity must suddenly come to an end, and a great trouble would fall upon the country, by which hundreds of the fighting men would be cut off in their youth and strength. Gad said to David, 'Choose thee either three years famine, or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence in the land.'

And David answered, 'Let me now fall into the hand of the LORD, for very great are His mercies, but let me not fall into the hand of man.'

XVII

THE THRESHING-FLOOR OF ARAUNAH

AS David sat in his palace on Mount Zion, during those three dreadful days, while the pestilence raged amongst his people, he must have felt very sad. Why had he been so proud and self-willed? Why had he not listened to Joab's counsel? He was thinking of these things when suddenly he saw a strange sight. A man of the Jebusite nation, named Araunah, had built a threshing-floor on the opposite hill, Mount Moriah; and close to it, looking down upon the city, appeared the angel of the LORD, with a drawn sword in his hand, which he held over Jerusalem, as a sign of GOD'S anger.

David was not alone in his sorrow. Some of the elders of Israel were with him, and they had cast off their usual robes, and put on garments of sackcloth to show their grief. They all saw

the angel, and they threw themselves upon the ground in fear. Then David prayed very earnestly to GOD. He owned his folly and sin in ordering the people to be numbered, and he entreated GOD to spare them, and to let the punishment fall only upon him and upon his family.

GOD is always merciful, and when He saw that David was really sorry for his fault, He was ready to forgive and comfort him. Very soon the prophet Gad came again to the palace, and this time he brought a gracious message to the King. GOD would pardon him, and the plague should cease; and, as a proof of his repentance, David must build an altar upon Mount Moriah, and offer a sacrifice there.

Araunah and his sons had been busy with their wheat when the angel appeared, and they had been frightened, and had hidden themselves in the threshing-floor. Presently they saw a number of men hurrying up the hillside, and as they drew near, Araunah found that it was the King himself, with his attendants. David told Araunah that he wished to build an altar upon that very spot, and that he would buy the threshing-floor for a fair price.

Then Araunah answered that he would give the King whatever he wished to have; not only the threshing-floor, but the oxen also, which had been treading out the corn, and the wooden threshing instruments, and even the wheat, to use for the sacrifice. But David would not allow him to do this. He said, 'I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.' So Araunah accepted the King's money, and David made haste to prepare the sacrifice. And when all was ready, GOD sent fire from heaven to burn the offerings, and the plague ceased among the people.

David had not yet made up his mind where the temple should be built, but now he felt sure that this must be the place which GOD had chosen; and when he gave into Solomon's care all the treasures which he had prepared, he told him that GOD'S house must be upon Mount Moriah.

All this happened long, long ago. The temple walls have fallen and disappeared, and at the top of Mount Moriah there is now a Mahometan mosque called the Dome of the Rock. The floor of the mosque is paved, except in the centre, where there is a mass of bare, unlevelled rock,

protected by a screen of lattice-work. Wise men think that this is the spot upon which David's altar was built, and that, when Solomon's workmen prepared the ground for the temple, he did not allow them to touch this holy place, but ordered it to be left for ever as a memorial of GOD'S mercy to His people.

XVIII

THE REBELLION OF ABSALOM

DAVID had many children, and some of them gave him great trouble, especially one whose name was Absalom. He was a very handsome young man, and, although he was wild and careless, he was a great favourite with the people.

At last, when David had been reigning for many years, Absalom thought that he would like to take the kingdom for himself, so he asked his father if he might go to stay at Hebron for a little time, and from Hebron he sent men through the country secretly to tell his friends what he intended to do.

Very soon a messenger brought the tidings to Jerusalem, saying, 'The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.' Perhaps David felt that he would rather give up his kingdom than

fight against his son, for, instead of gathering his soldiers together and preparing to defend Jerusalem, he said to his servants, 'Arise, and let us flee.' So they left Jerusalem in haste, and crossed the brook Kidron, which runs through one of the valleys below the city.

David's servants were faithful to him, and a troop of his soldiers also followed him with their wives and children. When they had crossed the brook they stopped to rest, and then David saw Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, coming down from the city with a company of Levites, carrying the Ark of GOD. But the King would not allow them to come with him. It was not right to bring the Ark away from its tabernacle, so he begged the two priests to return at once to the city, and he promised to remain in the plain near to the Jordan until they sent him news of what Absalom was doing.

The King had rested at the foot of Mount Olivet, which is opposite to Jerusalem, and now the sad procession began to climb the steep road on its way to the river Jordan. They wept as they looked back upon the homes they had left so suddenly, and no doubt many of them won-

dered whether they would ever return, or whether Absalom would really make himself King, and force his father to remain in exile.

When they had crossed the mountain, and were passing along the road towards Jericho, a man named Shimei, who belonged to the family of Saul, met the sorrowful company, and began to curse David and to speak cruel words to him, telling him that GOD was punishing him because he had taken the kingdom from Saul. This was not true, and Abishai, the King's nephew, was very angry when he heard it, and would have killed Shimei, but David prevented him; so this wicked man followed the King for some distance, cursing him and throwing dust and stones at him.

When Absalom came to Jerusalem and found that his father had left the city, he took possession of the palace, and called his friends round him, saying, 'Give counsel among you what we shall do.' And one of the counsellors, named Ahithophel, answered, 'Let me take a troop of soldiers and follow the King, and I will smite him only, and bring back all the people unto thee.' But another man, Hushai, who was really David's friend, and had remained in the city, so that he

might find out Absalom's plans, said, 'The counsel of Ahithophel is not good.' And he advised Absalom to wait until he could gather the whole army together, and then lead them himself to battle against his father.

Absalom was a wicked, undutiful son, and he liked Hushai's plan better than that of Ahithophel, so he ordered the army to be made ready, while Hushai went secretly to Zadok and Abiathar and desired them to send messengers at once to David, to warn him of the danger.

XIX

THE DEATH OF ABSALOM

ZADOK and Abiathar knew that it might be difficult to send a message to David without Absalom's knowledge ; so Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, and Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, did not return to Jerusalem, but waited in one of the valleys below the city until the priests had found out what was to be done.

At last a girl came down from the Water-gate to the Fuller's Spring, and spoke to the two young men who were lingering near it. When she left them, they began to run along the road towards the plain of Jordan, and a boy, who had seen them talking to the girl, guessed where they were going, and carried the news to Absalom.

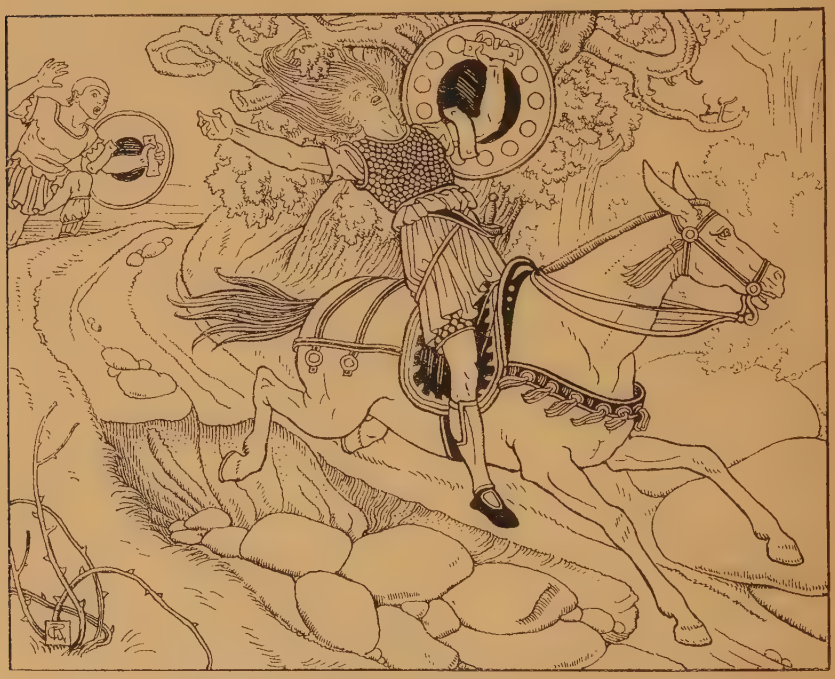
His servants went off quickly in pursuit, but Ahimaaz and his companion were good runners, and they reached the little town of Bahurim in

time to find refuge in a house there. Absalom's servants followed, but could not find them, so they went back to Jerusalem. The woman of the house had been very clever in hiding the young messengers. Eastern houses are built with an open court in the centre, and there is often a deep cistern beneath the court, to hold the rain-water. Ahimaaz and Jonathan went down into the cistern, while the woman, after spreading a cloth over the narrow entrance, heaped a quantity of ground corn upon it, and Absalom's servants never thought of looking underneath this.

Hushai's message was carried safely to the King, and he made haste to cross the river Jordan, and settled with his followers at Mahanaim. Some rich men of the Gileadites, who lived near, were very kind to him, and brought beds, and food, and whatever else they thought would be useful to the little band of exiles.

David could not bear the thought of fighting against his son; but, when he found that Absalom had actually gathered the army together, and crossed the Jordan to attack him, he knew that he must defend himself. So he divided his

soldiers into three troops, and prepared to go out with them to battle. But his people loved him too dearly to let him go with them, and they



'His thick hair caught in the branches above him.'

begged him to stay quietly in the city. David was glad to do this, and he took care to give his faithful servants one parting message, 'Deal gently, for my sake, with the young man, even with Absalom.'

It happened that the battle was fought, not upon the open plain, but in the wood of Ephraim, and, as Absalom rode upon his mule amongst the trees, he met with a strange accident. His thick hair, of which he was very proud, caught in the spreading branches above him, and he could not free himself. The mule went on, leaving its master hanging helpless; and a man, seeing him there, went at once to tell Joab. And Joab said, 'Why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee twelve shekels of silver and a girdle.' But the man reminded Joab of David's last words to his little army, 'Beware that none touch the young man Absalom.'

Joab had heard the charge, and he knew how dearly David loved his ungrateful son; but he himself hated Absalom, and was very glad to have him in his power, so he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them into Absalom's body as he hung in the tree, and then his ten armour-bearers gathered round the Prince and killed him, for he could do nothing to defend himself.

XX

THE GRIEF OF DAVID

WHEN Absalom was dead, there was no longer any need for fighting, so Joab ordered his trumpeter to recall David's men, who had overcome the Prince's soldiers, and were pursuing them as they fled towards the river. He would not carry the body of Absalom back to Jerusalem, to be buried with the honour due to his royal rank. He chose to treat the dead Prince only as a rebel, so he cast his body into a pit in the wood, and covered it with a heap of stones.

The battle was over, and the little army prepared to return to Mahanaim, wondering, no doubt, how the King would receive their news. He would be glad that the war, which might have lasted a long time, and have cost many lives,

should be ended, but what would he feel when he heard that his son was dead?

The young priest, Ahimaaz, came to Joab, and offered to run quickly before the army, and carry the tidings of victory, but Joab would not allow him to go. He desired another man, named Cushi, to go forward with the message; but, when Cushi had started, Ahimaaz begged so earnestly that he might go also, that at last Joab gave him leave. Ahimaaz was a very swift runner, and he soon overtook Cushi, and passed on before him towards Mahanaim.

David was very anxious to know all that was going on, and he went to the gate of the city and sat there to wait for news. The watchman looked out from his tower by the gate, and when Ahimaaz came in sight he told the King that he could see a man running alone. Then David knew that he was bringing a message, and, when the watchman said that his running was like the running of Ahimaaz, the King felt comforted, for he said, 'He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings.'

Very soon Ahimaaz reached the city, and bowed down before the King, saying, 'Blessed be the

LORD thy GOD, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the King.' And David asked eagerly, 'Is the young man Absalom safe?' Then Ahimaaz felt that he could not tell the sad tidings, so he answered, 'I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was.'

But Cushi was not far behind, and he thought less of the King's sorrow than of the victory over the rebel army, and as he came up to the gate he cried, 'Tidings, my lord the King; for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.' And David asked again, 'Is the young man Absalom safe?' and Cushi answered, 'The enemies of my lord the King, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is.'

Then David knew that his son was dead. Absalom had caused him much trouble and sorrow for many years. He had driven him from his home and from his kingdom, and had even brought an army to fight against him; but all this had not destroyed the father's love for his child. He did not ask how Absalom had died. He could not bear to hear anything of the battle

or the victory. He could think of nothing but his grief, and he rose up and went into the chamber

'"O, Absalom, my son, my son!"'

over the city gate that he might weep alone; and as he went he cried,

'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would GOD I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!'

XXI

DAVID'S RETURN TO JERUSALEM

WHEN Joab returned to the city, he was told that the King was full of grief because of his son's death. The soldiers were all sorry, and, instead of marching proudly through the gates, with songs of triumph and great rejoicing, they passed quietly into the city, as if they had been conquered, and were returning in shame and sorrow.

But, although the people understood why David did not meet them and praise them for what they had done, Joab was not satisfied. He had hated Absalom, and he was so glad to think that he had killed his enemy, that he did not like to see the King mourning for him. He went quickly into the chamber where David sat weeping for his dead son, and he spoke to him very roughly and disrespectfully, telling him that he was behaving

as though he loved his enemies and hated his friends. And Joab said, 'I perceive that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.'

This was very cruel and untrue, but Joab had a hard and unkind nature, and he also feared lest the people should think David ungrateful, and so leave him in exile, instead of restoring him to his throne. He would not allow him to remain in the chamber, but desired him to show himself at once to the soldiers, and speak kindly to them.

David knew that, in spite of his harshness, Joab was giving good advice, so he went back to the gate and sat there; and when the soldiers heard of it they gathered round him, and he spoke to them, and thanked them for their faithful service.

The King did not return at once to Jerusalem, for the country had been sadly unsettled by Absalom's rebellion; but, after a little time, he prepared to cross the Jordan once more on his way home. The men of Judah went down to Gilgal to meet the King, and Shimei went also with a thousand men of the tribe of Benjamin. He had been very ready to curse David and ill-

treat him when he was in trouble, and now he feared lest the King should put him to death for what he had done. So he came very humbly and begged the King's pardon. Abishai was still anxious to kill Shimei, but David would not listen to him. He said he would have no one put to death at that time, because he was returning in peace to his kingdom. So the wicked Benjamite escaped.

The rich Gileadite chief, Barzillai, who had been so kind to the King all through his days of trouble, came down to the river to bid him farewell. He was a very old man, and David could not help loving him for all his kindness. He felt that he would like to have so good a friend always near to him, and he asked Barzillai to come and live with him in Jerusalem. But Barzillai answered that he was too old to change his home, and that he would rather stay in his own city, and die there, and be laid to rest near the graves of his father and mother. But he allowed his son Chimham to go with the King.

So David returned to Jerusalem, and in time the nation settled down once more in peace under his rule.

XXII

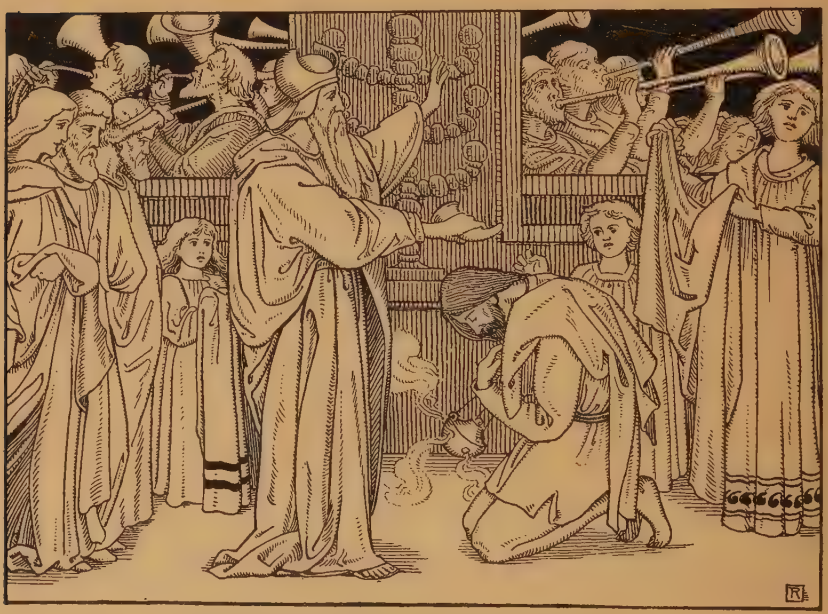
THE ANOINTING OF SOLOMON

AFTER Absalom's death, his brother Adonijah supposed that the kingdom would one day belong to him ; and, like Absalom, he became impatient, and determined to seize the crown while his father was still living.

Adonijah was neither wise nor good, and GOD had told David that one of his younger sons, Solomon, was to succeed him. Joab did not wish Solomon to reign. Perhaps he feared that he would have less power over him than he had had over David. He therefore promised to help Adonijah ; and Abiathar, the priest, and a number of the soldiers joined with them in the conspiracy. Zadok and the prophet Nathan were among those who remained faithful to David, and one day Nathan came to the palace in haste to take counsel with Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon,

for he had heard that Adonijah had gathered his friends together at the Fuller's Spring in the valley of Kedron, and he knew that they intended to proclaim him King.

David was now an old man, and feeble, and



'Zadok anointed Solomon with the holy oil.'

perhaps Nathan feared to trouble him. But he knew that if Adonijah were on the throne he would most likely put Solomon to death, and that all David's plans for the building of GOD'S temple

would be laid aside and forgotten. So he desired Bathsheba to go immediately to her husband, and ask him whether it was not his wish that Solomon should succeed him; and Nathan promised to follow, and tell the King what Adonijah was doing.

David loved Solomon very dearly, and the news of Adonijah's conspiracy was a great trouble to him. In spite of his age and weakness he roused himself for his son's sake, and sent quickly for Zadok, and told him what to do. The King's own mule was brought out, and Solomon was placed upon it. Then a grand procession was formed, and the Prince rode down to the pool of Gihon. There Zadok anointed him with the holy oil, while the trumpets were blown, and the people shouted, 'GOD save King Solomon.'

Then the procession returned to the city, with music and shouting and great rejoicing, and David's officers and servants all went in to bow before him, that he might know they were obedient to him, and were willing to accept Solomon as their King.

Adonijah and his friends were near enough to the city to hear the sound of the trumpets as

they sat feasting, and Joab wondered what had happened. They could hear the shouting also, and presently Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, came in, and told them that Solomon had been anointed, and that the people of Jerusalem had acknowledged him to be their King.

Then Adonijah was frightened, and he no longer dared to rebel against his father. He humbled himself before Solomon, and the young King promised that, so long as he lived peaceably, he should not be punished.

XXIII

THE DEATH OF DAVID

DAVID was now seventy years old. He had fought many battles and had subdued all the nations round him. The kingdom was at peace, and the people were prosperous and happy. The army and the government were well-ordered, and Solomon would be able to give his whole mind to the great work of building the temple.

The young King had been anointed in haste because of Adonijah's conspiracy, and David wished him to be proclaimed a second time in a more public manner. So he appointed a day, and all the Princes of the tribes, and the chief men of the cities and of the army, assembled at Jerusalem; and David spoke to Solomon before them all, telling him to serve GOD faithfully and to rule his kingdom well. And David told the

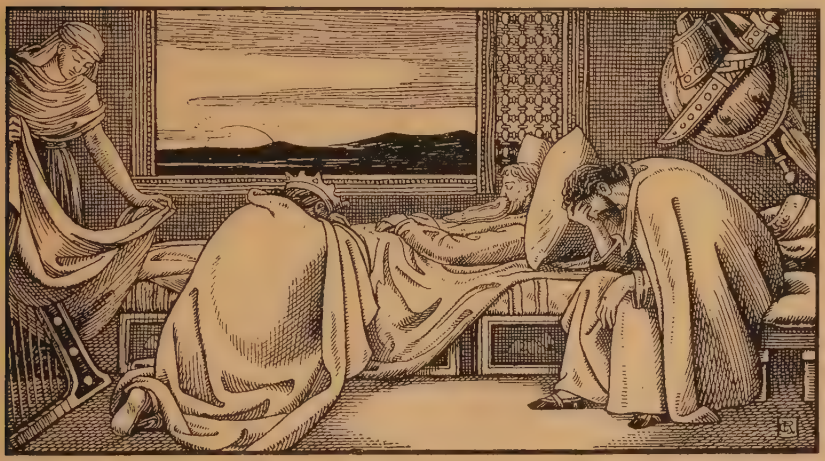
people how he had wished to build a house for GOD, but had not been allowed to do so, because he had been obliged to fight so often and to shed so much blood.

Then he delivered into Solomon's hands all the plans and patterns which GOD had taught him to make for the temple; and he gave him also the gold and silver, and the stores of precious things which he had gathered together for the work. And lest Solomon should fear that the task would be too great for him, he ended his charge with these beautiful words: 'Be strong and of good courage, and do it. Fear not, nor be dismayed, for the LORD GOD, even my GOD, will be with thee. He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.'

Then David turned to the people, and asked them if they would also make offerings for the building of GOD'S house. And they were glad to take part in the holy work, and gave willingly, bringing offerings of gold and silver, brass and iron, and precious stones. It was a day of great happiness and rejoicing, and the good old King praised GOD before all the people, and then called

upon them to do the same. 'And all the congregation blessed the LORD GOD of their fathers, and bowed down their heads and worshipped the LORD.'

On the next day the rejoicings were continued,



'The time came for him to die.'

sacrifices were offered, and the people feasted and praised GOD. Solomon was anointed for the second time, and the whole nation united in doing homage to him.

No doubt David was glad to give up the kingdom into his son's hands. He had had a long and busy life, and now he was weary and feeble.

Very soon the time came for him to die, and he passed away 'in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour.' He had loved GOD from his childhood, and in all his troubles he had been helped and comforted. He had sinned many times, for no one can serve GOD perfectly in this world, but he had always owned his sin and asked to be forgiven; so that, through all his life, he had been what Samuel called him in his youth, a man after GOD'S own heart.

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